



VOYAGERS ON TRIP DOWN THE CANAL—Five men in one tent, trying to keep dry on their trip down the C. & O. Canal.

Left to right: Rudolph Kauffmann, II; Don Strausbaugh, Abbie Rowe, Elwood Baker and Donald E. McHenry.—Star Staff Photo.

Paddle Your Own Canoe (Just Try It!) in Famed Canal

Five Washingtonians Find Trip Is Fun,
But the Portaging Is Wearisome

(Two pages of photographs in today's Rotogravure Section.)

By RUDOLPH KAUFFMANN II.

If you don't like to carry a canoe about as well as to paddle it, you'd better confine your canoeing to level sections of the C. & O. Canal where there are few locks. At least until the Office of National Capital Parks figures out some way to help the poor, tired canoeist around the 18 locks which exist between Key Bridge and Seneca, Md.

Also you might try to outguess the weatherman and hit sunny weather instead of a cloudburst. A canoe trip from Seneca to Georgetown over that section of the canal which has been reconstructed and filled with water since 1938 had been planned since last spring. After several postponements, brought on by leaks and breaks in the newly rebuilt canal banks, we started on our trip—the writer, Elwood Baker, Evening Star photographer; Don Strausbaugh, Star messenger; Donald E. McHenry, park naturalist; and Abbie Rowe, park employee and canoeist extraordinary.

Started at Rushville. We had two canoes, a couple of tents, food, cooking utensils and the usual camping paraphernalia. We also had a special permit from the parks office to build fires, cut firewood, etc. No permit is needed to canoe, but to camp, yes. We launched the canoes at lock 23 where Rushville, a canal company settlement, once stood. All traces of Rushville are practically gone. A canal company tavern and other buildings once stood there. From 1830 until 1833 Rushville was the upper terminus of the canal and a bustling community. It was named in honor of Richard Rush, who in 1831 negotiated a loan from Cromwell Brothers, a Netherlands banking concern whereby the cities of the District of Columbia—Washington, Georgetown and Alexandria—were able to subscribe to \$1,500,000 worth of canal company stock. The first section of the canal completed was from Little Falls to Rushville.

Thrice during the Civil War Col. John S. Mosby of "Partisan Rangers" fame, crossed the Potomac in the vicinity of Violet's lock and raided Union positions. The third raid, on July 11, 1864, was in co-operation with Gen. Jubal A. Early's attack on Washington.

Pass Game Refuge. Leaving Rushville we paddled through one of the most beautiful stretches of the canal. On one side the Potomac dashes over rocks and around a hundred and one small islands while on the other rise the sheer cliffs of Blockhouse Point, where a Union blockhouse to protect Washington against raids stood for many years.

Huge sycamores, oaks and elms tower over quiet canal waters, the latter trailing their branches only a few feet above the surface. Herons, wild ducks and other wildlife fled as the Maryland State game refuge below Blockhouse Point was passed.

Mr. McHenry estimated that some of the sycamores were over 150 years old and were healthy youngsters when workmen built the canal 110 years ago with the slogan "Pittsburgh or bust" lending extra punch to picks and shovels.

The canal, due to irresistible competition from the newly born Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, never went beyond Cumberland, but old maps show how scores of locks were to have lifted the waterway over the backbone of the Appalachians and down the Youghabeny and Monongahela Rivers to connect with the Mississippi River system. Travelers of the 1830s preferred, when going from Georgetown to Leesburg, Va., to take the packet boat, Charles Fenton Mercer, which in the early years of the canal plied from Georgetown to Rushville, transferring there by ferry across the river to the Leesburg coach.

Ad in 1831 Paper. The Mercer, according to an advertisement in an 1831 copy of the Globe of Washington, left at 7 a.m. from Georgetown and returned to Georgetown at sunset. Fare to Great Falls was 37½ cents, to Rushville, 59 cents, and to Leesburg, \$2. Breakfast was 31¼ cents, dinner, 50 cents, and supper, 25 cents. Wine ran from 50 cents to \$1.50 a bottle.

The packet boat advertisement is flanked by one placed in the Globe by the Washington-Leesburg Coach Co. This is embellished by a line drawing of a coach drawn at breakneck speed by four snorting horses. But to get back to our own trip our troubles began at lock 22, Pennfield's Lock, as it is called. Since Congress failed to appropriate a penny for maintenance and opera-

tion of the canal this year, there are no lock tenders. Therefore, a portage was necessary.

Orthodox portaging took too much time so we picked up each canoe and its cargo and walked it to the nearest point below the lock where it could be launched.

This constant business of carrying the canoes around locks just about spoiled the trip.

The sight of Pennfield's Lock recalled the legend of the drunken lock tender, who in 1876 let the water out of the lock before a canal boat was entirely through the upper lock gates, thereby cracking the boat on the sill of the lock, depositing 112 tons of coal at the bottom of the canal and involving the canal company in lengthy legal proceedings.

Old Lockhouse Just Shell.

The old lockhouse is now little more than a hollow shell. The canal reconstruction program, however, calls for the rebuilding of the lockhouses for public use. The houses in this section of the canal were built in 1828-30.

Safely around Pennfield's Lock we paddled comfortably to Swain's Lock, No. 21, near which the present generation of the Swain family lives.

Another portage was made and just below the lock and around a bend we stopped to lunch off tea and cheese and bacon sandwiches grilled over a campfire.

Just as we were launching the canoes Park Policeman Walter Sconyers came up. The towpath for a large part of the distance is now wide enough to accommodate a scout car and Policeman Sconyers obligingly paced us along the way and told us we were doing 6 m.p.h.—pretty good, we thought.

Passing through more beautiful scenery, we next approached Great Falls. The roar of the falls could be heard a mile away. In canal days the company maintained a village here. It was called Crommelin in honor of the Dutch bankers who so helped finance the canal. Crommelin now consists of a group of houses where live War Department employees who look after the intake of the conduit which supplies Washington with water, and well-known Great Falls Tavern—slated for reconstruction in the canal rehabilitation program. A new parking lot and canoes for rent are recent installations at Crommelin.

Meet Old Canalman.

Luckily at Lock 20, near the tavern, we found Lewis Connor, 60-year-old canalman, who was born on a canal boat and who has spent most of his years either operating a boat or a lock somewhere along the canal. He now is employed by the tavern.

"Canal's a lot different now from what it was when the company operated it. Locks are in better shape, channel is dredged out better and the towpath's a lot wider," said Mr. Connor as he opened the butterfly paddles in the upper lock gate to let water roar into the lock.

When the lock was filled to the upper level Mr. Connor put his back, still wiry from years of hard work, to the lock beam. However, it took some assistance to open the gate. Into the lock went the canoes, the upper gates were closed and the paddles in the lower gates opened to bring the lock down to the lower canal level. It was a new sensation to sink from sight between walls the

stone quarried by hand in the 1820's. Once the water was down to the lower level, Mr. Connor opened the lower gates and the canoes swung out into the canal again.

Our fun was over, however, because below Great Falls there are five locks in quick succession. All have to be portaged and two steep stone walls have been built along the towpath so that it would be virtually impossible for less than three persons to lower a canoe to the water gain without damaging its thin hide. By the time we had negotiated the fifth lock we had enough. One or two locks to portage with a couple of miles of paddling in between wouldn't be so bad, but five in quick succession, some close together, are plain drudgery.

Pass 1889 Flood Point. Below lock 15, however, is another level stretch of canal about 3 miles long. In the middle of this stretch the canal occupies an old flood channel of the river, in places 90 feet deep, called Widewater. Its rocky shores and small islands make the scenery unlike anything near Washington, being more like that of New England.

It was here that floods, including that of 1889 which forced the canal company into the hands of receivers, did their worst damage. About \$100,000 had to be spent in one contract alone to repair this section of the waterway. The canal is 90 feet above the river and the river is wont to seek its old channel with disastrous effects. The park office had arranged things now so that by blasting a portion of earth fill at one point the rest of the canal can be saved.

At the end of Widewater we camped for the night, pitching our tent on the towpath. We had brought our drinking water down the canal with us and others are advised to do likewise until the park office is able to provide good water at strategic points.

Cooking the evening meal was perhaps the high point of the trip. Grouped around the fire we broiled steak, fried tomatoes, made soup and coffee and, after eating more than any one should, lay about the fire until bedtime.

The Rains Came. Then came the showers. Happily, Abbie had brought a good tent with a groundcloth capable of sleeping five abreast. Even so the water,

plus various insects, managed to find us. The hard-packed towpath was soon turned to mud.

No one was anxious to sleep late, but we managed to build a fire and breakfast off bacon, eggs, flapjacks and coffee before the rain got too hard.

We started down the canal again and ran into more locks. There were seven of them in quick succession, Nos. 14, 13, 12, 11, 10, 9 and 8. About half-way through this ordeal of canoe carrying, a cloudburst hit us, drenching everything and adding considerable weight to the contents of the canoes. From time to time, however, we had a chance to ease up and notice that we were passing some beautiful scenery, the new naval testing basin at Carderock, the neat camps of the two colored C. C. outfits which have been working on the canal, Cabin John, Glen Echo and numerous summer cabins where Washingtonians enjoy the canal and river.

Miss Historic Section. When we got to Lock 6 the spirit of adventure was gone. We decided to quit.

Drenched and weary we hauled the canoes out on the bank and called for help in the form of a Star car and a Park truck. We had planned to go through to Key Bridge in Georgetown past Lock 5, where we had figured on getting Mrs. Julie King, only lock tender still employed on the canal, to let us through the lock, and down the 5-mile home stretch—the second section of the canal to be completed, more than a century ago.

Therefore we missed seeing that portion of George Washington's Potomac Canal which is still used to feed the C. & O. Canal at Lock 5, the site where President John Quincy Adams broke ground for the canal on July 4, 1828, the same day that John Carroll of Baltimore, the cornerstone for the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in Baltimore; the outlet incline below Lock 5 which was to slide boats into the river but was never used after several men were killed on its first trial, and other points of interest. But—We'd had enough!

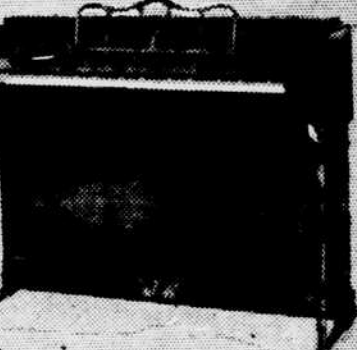
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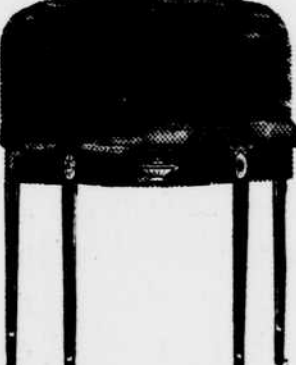
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